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New Framework Calls for Retooling Higher Education Policy to Serve Today's Students and Workforce Needs

Higher Learning Advocates releases policy agenda targeting strong focus on high-quality student outcomes, embrace of innovative models, update of accreditation policies and improved data

WASHINGTON, D.C (October 30, 2017) -- Today, Higher Learning Advocates, the new non-profit organization launched in early 2017 to update federal policy to match the changing needs of today's students and workforce, released its policy framework. The three-pronged plan outlines policy ideas for shifting the focus of federal policy from higher education to higher learning by ensuring high-quality outcomes, focusing on today's students and creating a more affordable and responsive system of education and training beyond high school.

The organization announced the new framework in conjunction with an event at the National Press Club, which featured a panel discussion about the needs of today's students featuring Dr. Chris Bustamante of Rio Salado College, adult students John Englehart (UMUC '17) and EJ Delperio (George Mason University '18) and moderator Kavitha Cardoza of *PBS NewsHour* and *Education Week*.

Higher Learning Advocates argues federal policy must adapt to meet the needs of today's students, including part-time students, working adults, first-generation college-goers, student veterans and students of color. While most federal higher education policies were designed when the typical college student attended a four-year college directly after high school, the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 75 percent of students today are now either working adults, part-time students, parents with dependent children or student with some other non-traditional characteristic.

"We need to modernize higher education for a new generation of students," said Dr. Chris Bustamante, a Higher Learning Advocates board member and president of Rio Salado College, nationally-recognized for its focus on serving a diverse cross-section of students. "Quality, outcomes and the needs of today's students should guide federal policy rather than historical precedent and institutional convenience. Built on those three principles, new policy solutions can help institutions and systems support and educate a broader range of students and embrace technological innovation."

The new framework proposes raising the quality of postsecondary learning by updating the federal policies guiding accreditation to better align requirements with student outcomes and allow for new models of quality assurance to assess new and innovative providers of postsecondary education. Additionally, the bipartisan organization is calling on policymakers to improve student data and information systems and provide students and families with greater transparency into the return on investment of their college choices.

To bridge the gap between today's students and the prevailing system of higher education, the organization supports changes to the current federal student aid system to better serve adults and other non-traditional students. Higher Learning Advocates is proposing a shift that would enable federal student aid to be used for all high-quality learning including innovative models such as competency-based education, apprenticeships, employer-based training—so long as they deliver strong student outcomes and adhere to rigorous quality assurance.

“The demand for education and training beyond high school continues to grow while the gap between federal policy and what today’s students need widens,” said Julie Peller, executive director of Higher Learning Advocates. “Meeting the needs of today’s students requires us to once again put students at the center of policy. Our mission is to help build bipartisan support for making that shift.”

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About Higher Learning Advocates: Higher Learning Advocates is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. We support a system of higher learning that is student-centered, equitable, outcomes-based, and focused on educational quality by advocating for policies that are based on student outcomes, make postsecondary education and student aid work for today’s students, and ensure access and affordability. We are bipartisan, strategically minded, and focused on improving postsecondary access and success for all students. Our bipartisan board of directors includes:

- Hon. Margaret Spellings, President of the University of North Carolina System
- Rep. George Miller, Former House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman
- Gov. John Engler, Retired President of the Business and Governor of Michigan
- Dr. Chris Bustamante, president, Rio Salado College and Maricopa Corporate College
- Dr. Dewayne Matthews, Lumina Foundation Fellow
- Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Ms. Teresa Lubbers, Commissioner of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education

To learn more, please visit www.higherlearningadvocates.org, follow Higher Learning Advocates on [Twitter](#) and sign up for email updates.